

VZCZCXRO2378  
PP RUEHIK  
DE RUEHBM #0138/01 0251534  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 251534Z JAN 06  
FM AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3506  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 0032  
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT 0025  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0359  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0098

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BUCHAREST 000138

SIPDIS

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STATE DEPT FOR EUR/NCE BILL SILKWORTH

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VISITS TIMISOARA; UZBEK REFUGEES THANK U.S.

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11. (SBU) Summary: Timisoara Mayor Gheorghe Ciuhandu on January 18 described Timisoara as an economically-thriving city with commercial and cultural links throughout Central and Western Europe, during the Ambassador's first visit to the city. Nonetheless, Ciuhandu lamented that the central government had appropriated "insufficient funding" for infrastructure for the city, including the lack of highway links to Bucharest and other major cities. While in Timisoara, the Ambassador visited Uzbek asylum seekers who fled from the Andijan region in August 2005 and who are awaiting relocation to other countries, including the U.S. The refugees thanked the U.S. for ensuring their safe departure from the Kyrgyz Republic. The Ambassador also met high school students at the American Corner hosted by the Timis County Public Library; a group of Parliament members representing the city; officials at a mediation center for alternative dispute resolution established with PD/SEED funds; and managers and personnel at a manufacturing plant operated by U.S. firm Solectron. End Summary.

12. (U) Ambassador Taubman visited Timisoara on January 18, following a trip to Cluj the day before. Romania's fifth largest city, Timisoara has attracted significant investment in recent years, particularly from Italy, Austria, and other EU countries. Many areas of historic central Timisoara are also undergoing renovation, an indication of the relative economic success of the city as well as a commitment by local officials to restore the city to its pre-World War II prominence in the region.

Mayor Ciuhandu: "We're an International City"

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13. (SBU) The Ambassador was greeted by popular Timisoara Mayor Gheorghe Ciuhandu, currently serving in his third term. Ciuhandu is also president of the small Christian Democrat-Popular Party, formerly the National Peasants-Christian Democratic Party. Ciuhandu described Timisoara as the most "economically thriving" city in Romania, attracting four times the national average of investment per capita. He attributed this success largely to Timisoara's cultural and commercial links outside of Romania, emphasizing that "we're an international city" while characterizing other Romanian urban areas as "inward looking" and in many ways "still unprepared" for the opportunities EU accession will provide. He also underscored the importance of the "practical focus" of Timisoara's Polytechnic

University, compared to the more "ivory tower approach" of many of the country's other top universities, including Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj. These polytechnic students, he noted, "feed directly into local industry" and "help fuel the economy." Ciuhandu noted that unemployment in Timisoara had dropped to roughly two percent, putting upward pressure on wages and forcing some employers to seek talented personnel from other parts of the country, as far away as Iasi.

14. (SBU) Ciuhandu pointed to the city's airport as an economic engine, noting that it is the second largest in the country with direct flights to a number of European cities, including Milan, Frankfurt, and Vienna. He also attributed the city's success to a local spirit of entrepreneurship and its focus on administrative efficiency above partisan politics. One break on the city's further development, Ciuhandu lamented, was the failure of the central government to fund other important infrastructure projects, most importantly highways. Ambassador Taubman replied that Timisoara clearly appeared to be "on track" economically, and expressed hope that other mayors and localities would use the city's progress as a model.

Uzbek Refugees Thank the U.S.

15. (SBU) The Ambassador also visited the facility currently hosting 365 Uzbek refugees whom the Government of Romania accepted in July 2005, pending their relocation to the U.S. and other countries. About seventy-five of the refugees had just received notification the prior day that they would be resettled in various American cities on January 30 and February 2. The Uzbeks greeted the Ambassador with applause and gratitude for U.S. efforts to facilitate their departure from Kyrgystan and now to help resettle them permanently. The Uzbeks showed the Ambassador and Mrs. Taubman traditional handicrafts they are making at the facility, with modest

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assistance from USAID, as well as an outdoor oven they had constructed. At the same time, they expressed apprehensions about their eventual resettlement to third countries as well as about the well being of their family members back in Uzbekistan. Many expressed hope that they could be reunited with family members once they are permanently settled. The Ambassador thanked the director of the camp, Col. Livius Bisca, for the hospitality the Romanians have shown to those who fled last summer. At a subsequent press conference, the Ambassador praised Romania's willingness to temporarily shelter the refugees.

16. (U) The Ambassador toured the American Corner at the Timis County Library, opened in June 2005. During his visit, local students involved in a PD/SEED-funded civic education program briefed the Ambassador on a student government program they introduced in their high school that involved electing a student president. Many students hoped to have the opportunity to study abroad, including the in U.S.

17. (U) Next, the Ambassador also toured the PD/SEED-supported Timisoara Mediation Center, where mediators trained under the program described the challenges of introducing mediation as an alternative to judicial litigation. The mediators said they have made some progress but believe that adoption of a pending law proposed by the Ministry of Justice (with U.S. Embassy support) to expand the use of mediation in Romanian courts is critical. The Ambassador encouraged the Center to work with businesses to encourage the inclusion of mediation in legal contracts as an option for speedier resolution of disputes.

18. (U) The Ambassador ended his visit to Timisoara with a tour of Solectron, a California-based electronics manufacturing company that has picked up some of its business from companies that have relocated their manufacturing from

Chia to Romania for better access to the EU market.TAUBMAN